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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN'S TRIP TO
NICARAGUA, SADDAM'S EXECUTION

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage January 6-8 on the insolvency crises involving The Chinese Bank and the Enterprise Bank of Hualien. Coverage also focused on legislative elections in 2007, the pairing of possible candidates as running mates in the 2008 presidential elections, and the trial operations of Taiwan's new high-speed railway system.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, Washington correspondent Norman Fu noted in the pro-status quo "China Times" that President Chen Shui-bian's relationship with Washington will not return to normal before he leaves office, because Chen wants to push himself out of the box while the United States will try to box him in. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" argued that Chen should not make a trip to Nicaragua, as President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua has vowed to cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News," however, said Chen can revamp the island's ties with Nicaragua and that Washington's decision to allow Chen to transit the continental United States "signifies the repair of the rift between Washington and Taipei." A separate "China Post" editorial, on the other hand, discussed the execution of Saddam Hussein. The article said Bush "has succeeded in hunting down Saddam and sending him to the gallows, but he has failed to extricate American troops from the Iraqi quagmire and from preventing Saddam's ghost from haunting him." End summary.

¶3. President Chen Shui-bian's Trip to Nicaragua

A) "Bian's Transit Unexpectedly Placed Under the 'China' Category"

Washington correspondent Norman Fu noted in the "Washington Outlook" column in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (1/8):

"... What's regretful is that the United States has gone so far as to link A-Bian's transit with the 'one China' policy and the 'three communiques;' this is something that has never happened before. It is believed that such a move by Washington is related to Chen Shui-bian's statement in his New Year Day's address that 'Taiwan is part of the world, but absolutely not part of China.' As the KMT stated, Washington's new way of addressing [Chen's transit] was a result of Chen's looking for trouble. If he did not say the sentence above in his New Year Day's address and strongly emphasize the need to break away from the narrow framework of 'on China' and 'cross-Straits' [relations], perhaps the United States would not have put it in such a way as to target him directly.

"But the real irony was that while A-Bian was vowing to draw a clear line between [Taiwan] and China, the U.S. State Department has unexpectedly put his request for transit under the 'China' category [of its daily press briefing]. ... In fact, based on the State

Department's record of its previous press briefings, Bian's transits and other matters involving Taiwan were all placed under the 'Taiwan' category. The change this time was not without the intention to embarrass Bian deliberately. There is an analogy to Washington's move - namely, it's like putting Bian into a box, and as long as he intends to break out of the box, the United States will not hesitate to squeeze him back into the box and stop him from acting ostentatiously. To quote the American saying, A-Bian is really 'boxed in.'

"Of course Bian will not surrender easily; instead, he will wait for a chance to try to push himself out of the box. Washington, to prevent him from doing so, will naturally move carefully every step of the way and watch [him] closely. As a result, Bian's relations with Washington will not return to normal before he completes his term. This is basically a relationship based on a 'battle of wits.'

One can hardly blame the United States, because over the past six years since Bian came to power, there have been plentiful examples of his failure to keep his promises and creating surprises for the United States. How can the United States try not to guard against [him]?"

B) "The Presidential Voyage That Should Not Be Made"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (1/8):

"... We cannot bring ourselves to wish President Chen a happy trip, because it is a voyage that should not be made. There is no reason why Chen has to make the trip to extend his congratulations in person to Ortega, who has vowed to cut off diplomatic relations. The Sandinista president made that promise to Beijing in the run-up to his election. ... Another purpose of the visit, which is much more important, is to avenge the slap in the face Uncle Sam dealt Chen in May last year. He was going to San Jose to attend the inauguration of the Costa Rican president, but Washington, offended by his NICARAGUA, SADDAM'S EXECUTION

end-run to terminate the National Unification Council, denied him transit stopovers in the contiguous United States. As a result, the president had to make two long detours to and back from Costa Rica.

"Of course, President Chen learned a lesson. So this time around, he took every caution not to offend Uncle Sam again in delivering his New Year's Day address. He had his spokesman state that Washington had not asked to read his speech. Washington had to make sure he did not mention a new constitution for Taiwan before permission was given for him to lay over in San Francisco and Los Angeles. ..."

C) "Chen Can Revamp Nicaragua Ties"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (1/8):

"... The mainstream media has [sic] interpreted this presidential excursion as an effort to 'regain the high post' [sic] in Taiwan's domestic politics and to rise above the past months of being mired in controversy over a series of alleged scandals in the presidential office and the first family. Any exercise in 'head of state diplomacy' is bound to have domestic ramifications. In this case, Washington's arrangement to allow Chen to land in the two most important cities on the continental U.S.'s west coast signifies the repair of the rift between Washington and Taipei over the flap of the president's refusal to stopover in Anchorage on his way to the inaugural of Costa Rica President Oscar Arias last May. Moreover, Washington's decision marks a mild rebuke to opposition Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) Chairman Ma Ying-jeou by both [sic] refusing to deny U.S. transit to Chen, whom the KMT has painted as a 'corrupt' president. ..."

14. Saddam's Execution

"The Death of a Dictator"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (1/6):

"... There is no denying that Saddam was a brutal despot, and aggressor to boot. His invasion and occupation of Kuwait prompted the first Gulf War. He was eying Kuwait's oil the same way as America is eying Iraq's. Saddam knew this, and he told the world that George Bush's attack on Iraq was not because of his false accusation that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, but because it possessed oil. It turned out that Saddam was telling the truth. Bush's hubris plus his over-confidence in America's military might has bogged the world's sole superpower down in a costly and unpopular war. He has succeeded in hunting down Saddam and sending him to the gallows, but he has failed to extricate American troops from the Iraqi quagmire and from preventing Saddam's ghost from haunting him.

"Far from being 'an important milestone in Iraq becoming a democracy,' as President Bush so brazenly put it, Saddam's hanging is not an example of Western justice but instead of jungle justice. Saddam's worst crimes were committed when he was an American ally in the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, but he was condemned only after he became America's enemy. Saddam Hussein, the tyrant, dictator and despot, has suddenly become a martyr and hero in the Muslim world, and possibly beyond. In contrast, George Bush is seen as a bully and an aggressor. A milestone? Probably not. It is a millstone around Bush's neck. The mid-term elections last November spoke volumes of the voters' resentment of Bush, resulting in the GOP's resounding defeat in both houses of Congress. It seems that Bush's nightmare is just beginning, now that Saddam Hussein is dead."

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